

THE BEAUTY OF THE MASS Part 10

I would like to continue the explanation of the Mass by explaining the Entrance Rite.

The celebration of the Mass begins with the entrance procession of the priest and ministers. The entrance procession reminds us of the journey of the pilgrim Church toward heaven. An entrance hymn usually accompanies the procession to announce that Christ is with us, and we are ready to unite ourselves to Him. If a hymn is not sung, an antiphon prayer is said or sung.

We gather together by singing our opening hymn. It is important that everyone join together in singing the hymns at Mass. Remember what St Augustine said, "*He who sings well, prays twice.*"

As the entrance procession begins, the congregation should stand and turn toward the center aisle until the procession has passed. We turn to welcome Christ who is present in the person of the priest, who is present in the words of the Book of the Gospels, and who is present in all our brothers and sisters whom we are facing.

The entrance procession is usually led by the Processional Cross of the crucified Lord, a symbol of the focus of our faith, carried between two candles. On solemn feasts, the entrance procession is led by the thurifer—the minister carrying the thurible with burning incense.

Sometimes, other ministers also carry banners to mark the beauty and importance of the celebration.

The lector or deacon carries in the Book of the Gospels, held high to show its prominence in our lives and to remember that we always stand obediently under God's word.

Finally, the priest celebrant enters. He is a representative of Christ, and the prayer leader of the assembly.

Then the procession arrives in the sanctuary, the ministers and the celebrant make the proper reverence of a profound bow or a genuflection to the tabernacle containing the Blessed Sacrament.

Then the priest celebrant **reverences the altar with a kiss**. The kiss symbolizes the union of the Spouse, Christ, with the Bride, the Church. The priest is beginning to

accomplish the work of forging the union of the Church with her Master, the union of the soul with its Redeemer. The kiss also evokes in our memory the many kisses of that sinful woman in the Pharisee's home who did not cease kissing Christ's feet and washing them with her tears.

The **Altar** is the Lord's Table and the center of the Eucharistic action. It symbolizes the heart of the Church's life. The altar has always been considered a symbol of Christ. We cover the altar with a fine linen altar cloth out of reverence for the celebration of the memorial of the Lord's sacrifice. We also use candles—either on or near the altar—at every Mass as a sign of our reverence and festiveness. There also has to be a cross, clearly visible to the congregation either on the altar, near it or above it.

The altar reminds us of the Last Supper table where the very first Mass was celebrated with Jesus as both priest and victim. Finally, the altar stands for Jesus as the stone rejected by the builders that became the cornerstone.

In every altar or at the foot of the altar, there is an altar stone that contains the relics of a saint. This altar stone recalls the first centuries of the Church when the altar was often a stone slab placed over the tomb of a martyr who imitated Christ by sacrificing his life for Christ and the Gospel. This tradition keeps us connected to the roots of our faith.

On solemn feasts, you will see the priest celebrant incense the altar and the tabernacle to pay homage to Christ. In other parts of the Mass, incense is used to honor the gifts of bread and wine, the Gospel Book, the priest celebrant and the members of the congregation.

